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From theory to practice: Canalside Studio, a case study



University of
HUDDERSFIELD

School of Computing
and Engineering



CanalsideStudios

LET THE JOURNEY BEGIN...

Inspiring tomorrow's professionals

2012
THE AWARDS
WINNER | Entrepreneurial
University of
the Year

- School of Computing and Engineering Department of Informatics
 - Provides courses in engineering, computer science, digital media etc.
 - In 2005 validated two new degrees
 - BSc Computer Games Programming
 - BA computer Games Design

To ensure industry relevance curriculum developed in partnership with games companies (Team 17, Rockstar Leeds, GameRepublic etc)



Context

- The University has a long history of sandwich education (originally the mechanics institute)
- The decline in placement opportunities is well documented (e.g. Wilson, 2012)
- Work experience is still regarded as vital in helping graduates gain employment (government, sector skills councils, employers, all say graduates lack skills needed for employment)
- Creative technology industries are important to the UK Economy (there are still shortages of talented graduates with the right skills for these industries, (Livingstone & Hope, 2012))



Problem

- There are particular problems in finding placement opportunities in smaller companies (lots of creative technology companies are SME or Micro-enterprises)
- Even more difficult in creative technology companies where security, IP and coding standards are an issue. (i.e. games companies)
- Problem: Lots of capable students wanting placements but not enough available!



Partial solution

- In 2005 staff from the School successfully applied to the Higher Education Innovation Fund to set up an in-house computer game studio, “Canalside” (with matched funding from the University £200,000 investment)
- A commercial start up and part of University of Huddersfield Enterprises Ltd.
- Fully equipped studio providing year long work placements with bursaries for 8 students each year
- Managed by academic staff from the course team



Canalside Studio

- Getting the funding was the easy bit!
- Academic staff had relevant technical and creative skills but no commercial experience. Students were enthusiastic but inexperienced.
- We asked our games industry partners for help.!
- Barriers to entry on AAA consoles and lack of standardisation on mobile in 2005 meant we could only develop on PC.
- Microsoft had recently released XNA framework for indie developers which made development easier
- Students entered international Dream Build Play competition for Microsoft Xbox Live Arcade (XBLA) and came second.



Canalside Studio

The Dream Build Play prize was a publishing contract with on XBLA



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Canalside Studio

The 80:20 rule

- Although we had a successful game demo and a contract, 80% of the work of making the game lay ahead - we had about 20% of the knowledge require to do this
- We all had to learn very fast
- We learned from games industry members locally
- We learned from Microsoft (XBLA team in Seattle)
- The academic staff had some formal training on business (MBA etc)
- Students and staff learned together as a team
- We learned to be a team
- We made lots of mistakes



Canalside Studio

Learning to do business

- As a studio start up within the University we had to learn to do business and liaise with internal and external partners
- Microsoft was an intimidating partner but the people we worked with were very helpful and always quick to respond
- Although the University is very committed to Enterprise activity (Times Higher award!) at the time no-one had experience of this sort of software publishing contract
 - This led to delays in finalising the contract and insurances
 - We had difficulties getting the network permissions
 - Communication internally was often slower than when dealing with America.
 - We had to develop new networks across the organisation.



Canalside Studio

Team-working and Managing

- Working together in a commercial environment required students and staff to reconstruct their relationship.
- Managing the team required a shift in emphasis from teaching related values such as “individual learning”, “experience” and “process” towards pragmatic industry values like “time”, “cost”, “quality”
- Effective team-working is fundamental to games development so the Team had to come first every time.
- The Studio has formal HR rules, which were occasionally needed and we have made some tough decisions.



Canalside Studio

Lessons

- We learned to make and publish games!
- Learning alongside the students and from industry experts provided an “enterprise apprenticeship” for academic staff
- Cultural differences between industry and academia present challenges to academic staff engaging in Enterprise.
- Work experience enhances employability, there are no short cuts to this, simulated work in the classroom lacks bite!



Canalside Studio

Benefits

- We have gained professional developer status with Microsoft and have sold some games (not many)
- We are more credible with our industry partners because we have shown that we can make the journey from theory to practice
- The experience of practical games development authenticates teaching.
- Students involved in the studio have gained employment with games developers including: EA, Rockstar, Full Fat, Four Door Lemon, Crytek, Red Kite, Codemasters, Lightning Fish, Team17



Canalside Studio

Yo-Ho Kablammo



★★★★☆ 3,814

Like 0

Game Rating: E (Everyone)



Mild Fantasy Violence

Online Interactions Not Rated by the ESRB

Buy Game 800

Try Demo FREE



XBOX LIVE All Downloads

SORT BY Release date

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